

Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
March 1 & 2, 2014
John Crosby
Across the Lines: Blessed Are the Feet
Isaiah 52:7, Nahum 1:15, Romans 10:12-16

The thread this past month has been moving across the lines, taking the next step. Three weeks ago Noel Castellanos, the head of the Christian Community Development Association, came here and from this pulpit, he said, "When I became a Christian, I needed to know that Jesus is not just for white people." Or is he? Is He just for people of privilege? Will we in this community do more than just write checks? Will we be like Jesus and go to places where people do not look like us? We followed that up with the idea of continuing the conversation on Wednesday nights. We wanted to provide an opportunity where we could talk in a dialog rather than have just one person telling people what they should think, where we could argue and question together and see what our next step might be.

The second week we moved across the lines by telling the story of Jacob and Esau. Instead of big cultural things, we said reconciliation is intensely personal because there is so much that divides us. The next step was that I asked you to think of a broken relationship in your life and a way that you could step across the lines and bring peace at whatever level before you meet at the other person's grave. Then last week we had what I thought was just a powerful experience together, hearing the story of how Ray Norman and his daughter were almost killed. We saw how God used that terrible time to remind us that ideology divides but only the Gospel has the power to bring us to a place where we can forgive and be united. And those of you who were at The Table heard face to face how Mary Johnson and Oshea Israel experienced the bitterness of loss and the power of grace.

Today we want to pull all that together. One of our staff members said, "I feel like in the last three weeks we got the conversation started. Now we need to find ways to say, "It's your turn to pursue the reconciliation that God so much desires, not just for the world, but that God desires for you." As I listened to the kids' sermon, I felt like probably relatively few of you realized that was a Biblical story. It occurs three different times in the Bible, beginning with Isaiah the prophet.

7 How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" **8** Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes. **9** Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. **10** The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God [Isaiah 52:7-10].

If it sounds familiar but you can't place it, we hear it every Christmas in Handel's *Messiah*. It is one of the key themes, "How beautiful are the feet." It is also repeated two other times in Scripture, and when something is said more than once, you ought to take special note of it because it's a theme. The prophet Nahum echoes Isaiah.

15 Look, there on the mountains, the feet of one who brings good news, who proclaims peace! Celebrate your festivals, Judah, and fulfill your vows. No more will the wicked invade you; they will be completely destroyed [Nahum 1:15].

Peace comes! And the apostle Paul, in ways that we will talk about starting next week in Lent, talks about the good news saying,

12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile--the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, **13** for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." **14** How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? **15** And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" [Romans 10:12-15]

How can they hear the good news if somebody doesn't go and talk to them? As Deb tried to explain to the kids, you don't think of stinky, dirty, hurting feet as beautiful and so it needs to be explained. Rich Mouw, the former president of Fuller Seminary, came here and preached on this passage. He said to imagine that there is a war raging across the mountains to deliver some of the king's people from oppression. This is an ancient city so there's no email, no telegraphs. The people anxiously look to the mountain passes to see if their children who are soldiers will return or if they have been lost.

Finally they see a runner stagger into sight. He comes down the mountain and gasps out, "Just give me a second," and falls to his feet. People surround him. Can you imagine what would have happened if the next words out of his mouth are, "Boy, you guys cannot believe it! Those mountains are beautiful. I saw some incredible cities. I almost wanted to stop and build a little chalet up there in the middle." No, no, that's not what I want to hear. Or what if he said, "You know, I really feel good about myself for that long run. I only stopped twice. I think I made it in record time. Let's talk about the route that I took." No! Or if the runner came down and after he got his breath back said, "It's pretty amazing that out of all the people on the other side of the mountains, I got chosen." By then, people would be wringing his neck saying, "Tell us! What's the news?" If his next words were "God wins! God reigns! Peace is coming!" his feet, the feet of the people who bring that kind of news, would be called beautiful. God is still sending messengers out into a broken world to say, "Come home! The war is over. I bring good news."

I have to ask you, when people see you coming out of church and going into school or going into the store or going to work or to the club, when they see church people coming, do they think, "Oh, here comes somebody who is bringing good news"? I don't think so much. I think when our society sees church people coming, they often feel like we are coming with news of judgment, that we come to them out of churches bringing a message that says, "You are not measuring up." There is a cultural war between the way we are going and the way God wants us to go. There is condemnation that comes from the church instead of good news, and so there is a distance between church people and other people.

On Friday I heard a group of young leaders talking and one of them said, "Distance makes for demons." When somebody is at a distance from you, you demonize their position so somebody has to go across the lines. What we are saying this month is that we believe God is calling you to go and not just go and tell people about the message of judgment but to bring good news. How can you and I be messengers of good news so people are delighted when we show up at the party, so they miss us when we are not at work, so they bless us for crossing the lines at school? How can we bring reconciliation and hope? What stops you, what stops me, from bringing good news, from bringing reconciliation? I think sometimes it's because we have been hurt and are too proud to go across the lines. We are afraid that if we go in there and are the only one who has this liberal position, this conservative outlook, this view, people will not take this well. Some of you don't cross the lines because you are determined that you will not go first. *They* were the ones who hurt you. But I think what stops most of you, what stops me, is that I'm clueless. I'm just sort of cold, just sort of oblivious, to the needs around me.

That continues until one of two things happen. I think people are called to cross the lines when it becomes personal, when there's a need for a relationship that is broken to be made whole. I believe that's true for many of you. I think that God is telling you right now not feel that way but to go and say, "What can make this better?" When we preached on this, somebody posted a note on my Facebook, that's got nothing to do with this sermon, I just wanted to let you know that I have a Facebook page. But somebody posted a note on *their* Facebook page and said, "I just heard a sermon today about reconciliation. Would you please pray that if I get the courage to go and talk to my son, he'll listen to me." When it gets personal, God may be calling.

The other time that I think that you and I are called to bring our feet with good news across the lines is when God opens our eyes up, when we get off autopilot. I'd like to show you in just 57 seconds an example of how somebody's life was turned upside down and they had to do something about it.

[Video begins.]

This is the way all of this occurred. Alice and I were up on a big weekend in Sonoma and we were drinking wine and eating cheese, blissfully unaware of a lot of the evils in the world. And we strolled into this gallery and there was one photo in particular of these two boys, roughly my daughter's age, who had these giant rocks strapped to their heads. Alice started weeping uncontrollably, shaking, thinking that that could be *our* kids.

My daughter said, "They go out and they work and they get really sad and they cry. And whenever they cry, they might run away and bad things might happen." She said, "I want to free 500 of these kids. It was this gigantic, audacious goal, and we are thinking, "Okay. Wow! Talk to us about that." We said, "That's \$150,000. How are we going to do that?" And she said, "I could sell my lemonade."

[Video ends.]

"I want to free 500 children just like me. I didn't know this was happening. I want to free them. I don't even know how much money \$150,000 is," little Vivian says, "but I can sell my lemonade." To hear the rest of that story, you'll have to wait for the movie that will come out. But it's a

powerful story because little Vivian saw somebody her age and said, "God does not want it to be like this." She became a messenger of good news, willing to cross the lines.

I want to encourage you that you would *go* but I also want to say, it's not just a matter of going. It's a matter of going in a way that you bring *good news*. You don't just make things worse. You don't just confirm the prejudices of other people. How does what you come with become good news? May I suggest that it is that way only if it comes through your heart first. You will not be able to bring good news unless you yourself have received grace and hope. Do you believe that you are a beloved child of God? Do you really believe, down in your core, that when you wake up, God says, "Thank goodness you're awake, let's go!" Or have you just become a good person? Good persons are scary to be around.

People who come with good news find that that happens only if the messenger and the message are saturated with humility. So often we come with good news and we want to set people straight. The messenger who comes with good news comes with humility because it's not about them at all. And the way you can tell it's not about them at all is that people who bring good news *listen* more than they talk. They listen better than they speak. How are you at listening? One of my friends says that he only knows he is doing real reconciliation when he can tell the other person's side better than they can tell it. How about you? Can you do that?

We come with good news if somehow that news makes the other person know that they are as precious to God as we are. We so often divide it up into right and wrong, saint and sinner, good and bad, Republican and Democrat, straight and gay, us and the other. It is only good news if the other person knows they are as precious to God as we are. Do you start the conversation that way? It only becomes good news if it's not about us winning an argument and it's not about them winning, it's about them coming to the God, who is the source of good news.

One of the things that struck me most on this issue about gay marriage and gay faith and gay ordination was a guy saying, "I became convinced it is not my job to win the argument. It is my job to bring them to Jesus and let Jesus deal with them however Jesus wants to." That was a light bulb that went off for me. It's not my job to win the argument. I am certainly supposed to share my conviction but to do so in a way that loves them so that they believe they are as precious to God as I am. That brings them to Jesus so Jesus can do something. This idea of crossing the lines is something that I think is your call because it has something to do with Jesus. In the Book of Ephesians, the apostle Paul says, Jesus has broken down the wall that divides us.

14 For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall [Ephesians 2:4].

In other words, God goes first and breaks down the wall and now our job is to follow. It is still uncomfortable but we don't have to climb the wall. We go through the gap that our God makes. We cross the lines to tell someone else that they are as precious to God as we are.

Last night we had a team of about 11 people come up here and kneel and we blessed them because they are going across the world to cross the lines. They are going to Bethlehem and Jerusalem and Nazareth and Tel Aviv to learn from Muslims and Jews and Christians if there is any way to tear down those terrible walls. We asked God to help them find ways to bring good news of peace to everyone they meet.

May I tell you I think that's powerful, but sometimes it's not as tough to cross the world as it is to cross the street. Sometimes it is not as hard to cross the continent as it is to cross the bedroom or the living room. God knows where you and I need to go next. Is that reconciliation about forgiveness in a relationship? Is it about learning to have conversations about a divisive issue? It might be about learning how to go over to the others and finding a way to talk in a way that leaves the other side, if not convinced, at least feeling better about you. Is God moving you to go past writing a check? Now don't get me wrong, I want you to keep writing the checks, but is God calling you to go past writing the check to be the feet of good news with Urban Ventures, to tutor and love and get to know someone else face to heart? I believe God is calling you to cross the lines, whether it is at school or at work or at the club or the soccer match or in your bedroom. You need to ask God, "Where next?"

Last night Laura said that she felt like God is telling her to be aware of who God wants her to walk *toward* today instead of away from. God, show me the person I want to walk away from and give me a little courage to walk toward them today. I don't know about that. I only know that God is calling people in this room today to be messengers who bring good news that the God of grace and beauty and glory is coming to them. I want to be part of a church community that when we leave this place, people don't go, "Oh, watch out. Here they come!" We want people to look at us and say, "Ohhh, great feet! How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

Lord Jesus, I thank You that You have been with us all through this month, whether it was about forgiveness in a relationship that is strained, learning to participate in a discussion where people just scream at each other, or a call to cross the lines of comfort and privilege to a new land where we can serve. I pray that You who comfort the afflicted will afflict the comfortable this morning. I ask You in this moment to bring to the heart of every person a face or word where You are calling us to be peacemakers. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.